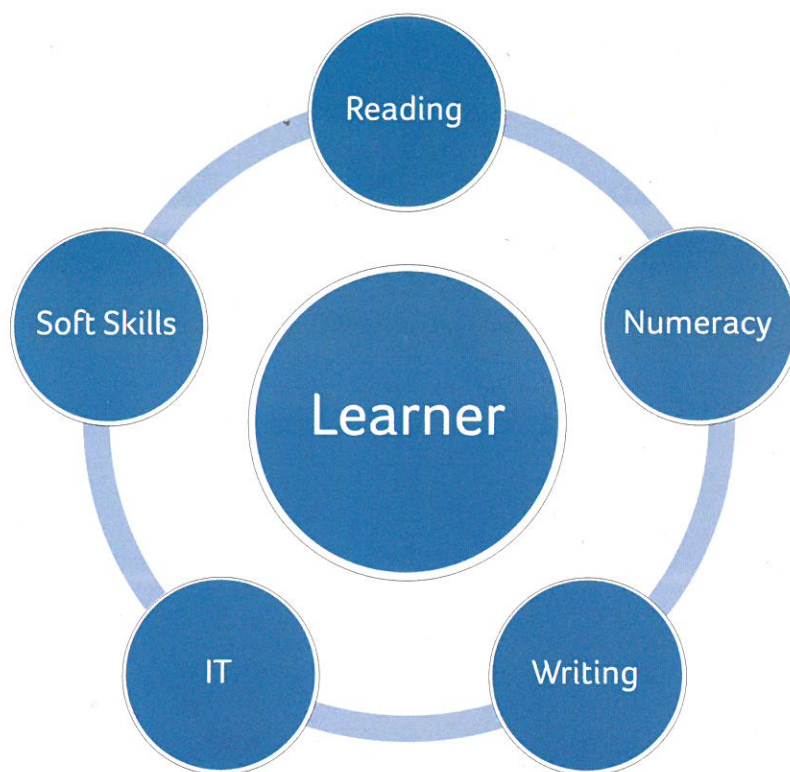


# *Initial Assessment in the Literacy Service*



## ***Administration of Initial Assessment in Adult Literacy Services***



## **Adult Literacy**

The power of literacy lies not only in the ability to read and write, but rather in an individual's capacity to put those skills to work in shaping the course of his or her own life. With the insight that genuine literacy involves "reading the word and the world," renowned educator Paulo Freire helped open the door to a broader understanding of the term, one that moves from a strict decoding and reproducing of language into issues of economics, health, and sustainable development. Freire's view of literacy is at once practical and all-encompassing. Whether it is the words of a language, the symbols in a mathematical system, or images posted to the Internet—literacy can transform lives. (EDC)

### ***The ALOA Position on a Learner Centred Initial Assessment Process***

***March 2014***

## **Adult Literacy Organisers' Association (ALOA)**

ALOA is the professional representative body for Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs), managing adult literacy and basic education services throughout the Republic of Ireland as part of an integrated Education and Training Board (ETB) Adult Education Service. The aims of the association include the promotion of a high quality Adult Literacy Service and to secure recognition of the economic, social, and cultural context of Adult Literacy. The association represents the views of Adult Literacy Organisers and contributes to the development of Adult Basic Education policy through member representation on committees at national level.

The role of ALO is multifaceted and involves supporting and managing students, volunteer and paid tutors, developing and implementing programmes, as well as managing finance, resources, premises and non-academic staff. The ALO is responsible for the quality of a diverse range of service provision and is also involved in drawing up policies with regard to Adult Basic Education at local level as part of integrated services within ETBs. The ALO ensures that the educational needs of the student are met; from initial consultation and assessment, to organising appropriate tuition and identifying progression options, to the point of exit. Importantly, by working with colleagues from across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector and linking with internal and external stakeholders, the ALO continues to ensure that options are available for adult learners with literacy difficulties who wish to return to education.

The ALOA supports its members in the delivery of a professional Adult Literacy Service and has made a significant contribution to Adult Literacy since its establishment in 1998. This contribution is built on the commitment of its members to provide a high quality professional literacy service in the Republic of Ireland.



## Foreword

The OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC 2012) is the most recent major international survey of adult skills. 24 countries, including Ireland, took part in the survey. According to PIAAC 18% of Irish adults are at or below Level 1 on the literacy scale, just over 25% of Irish adults score at or below Level 1 for numeracy and 10% of Irish adults said they had no computer experience. Unemployed people, early schools leavers, non-English speakers and older adults are most at risk of having literacy difficulties. Literacy has a key role to play in combating long-term unemployment, improving access to further education and training opportunities, breaking the cycle of poverty while building and strengthening communities.

The Education and Training Boards Literacy Services offer individuals the opportunity to return to education, it gives them a second chance to gain the skills and qualifications they missed out on the first time around. Returning to education can be daunting for adults and the first step difficult. Key to success in literacy programmes is the initial consultation, assessment and placement of learners which is traditionally carried out by the Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO). This position paper documents current practice in literacy services and an ALO perspective on the meaning and purpose of initial assessment in the literacy service. It will raise awareness of the importance of initial assessment in literacy provision and it is hoped that it will inform any initial assessment framework that may be developed by SOLAS.



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**Siobhan Mc Entee**  
ALOA Chairperson

Literacy involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. It includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change. (NALA).

## Acknowledgments

The ALOA would like to thank all the people who participated in and contributed to this publication.

In particular the Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) for taking part in the process and sharing their knowledge and experience on the initial assessment processes in place in ETBs. Our thanks to Dr Liz Mc Skeane for the development and collation of the initial preparatory work and for her guidance and advice before and during the ALO Forum 2013, and to NALA for their contribution to the planning and organisation of the ALO Forum 2013.

We express our thanks to the Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI) Literacy, Numeracy and Basic Education Forum for supporting the ALOA in the development of this publication and for their on-going support.

Thanks to Mary Hession for her input and the members of the ALOA Executive for editing and redrafting the document.

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## Introduction

In 2012 the Adult Literacy Organisers' Association produced the document 'Adult Literacy and Basic Skills in a Changing Sector – 7 Priorities to Consider'. The priorities and strategies set out in the document reflect over 30 years' experience of our members in providing basic education opportunities for adults within the ETB sector.

One of the key priorities set out in the document stated:

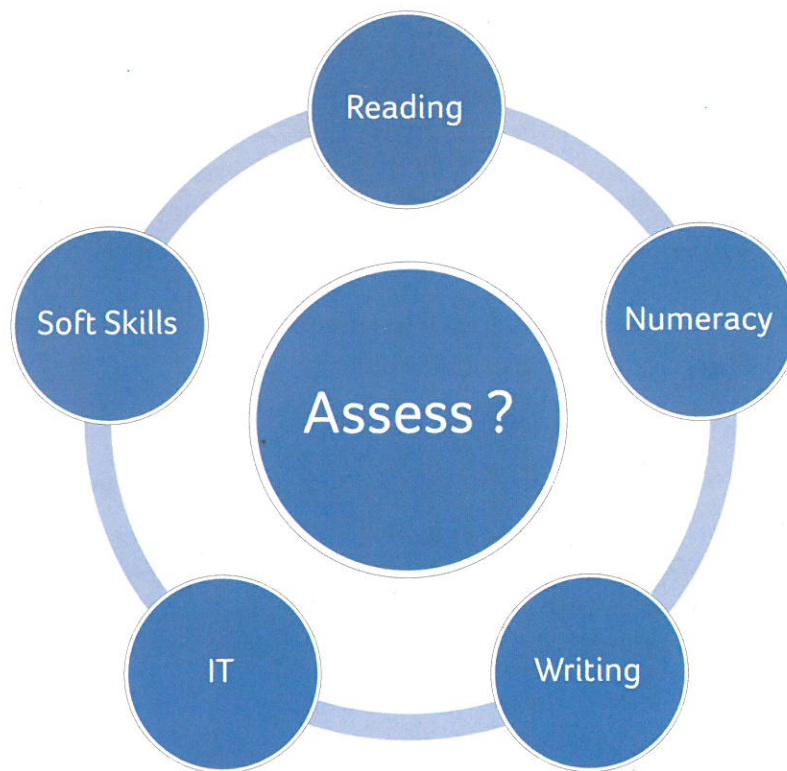
*'ETBs should develop and implement an initial assessment framework for the FET sector to a common national standard with appropriate referral protocols that support learners' entry onto courses'*

The Department of Education and Skills Review of Adult Literacy Provision in 2012 recommends that in the first instance guidelines for the administration of initial assessment in adult literacy services be drawn up by the DES in conjunction with ETBs and that a review of existing assessment instruments adapted by ETBs and suitable for use with adults should be undertaken, with a view to disseminating these for general use.

Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) have a wealth of experience in developing and administering learner centred assessment processes and it is our belief that ALOA should be central to the process of developing the new guidelines.

This document examines, from an ALO perspective, what is meant by initial assessment and its purpose, how it should be administered and recorded and the structures required to ensure the best approach to initial assessment. It also outlines the advantages and the steps involved, identifies some of the challenges and makes some recommendations. It encapsulates information gathered before and during the ALO Forum 2013. Through documenting current practice this position paper will assist programme managers, tutors, stakeholders and policy makers to understand the importance of initial assessment within the literacy service. It further aims to inform guidelines for the administration of initial assessment which may be drawn up by the DES and ETBs as recommended in the DES Review of Adult Literacy Provision in 2012.

## Assessment Process



**FIGURE 1**

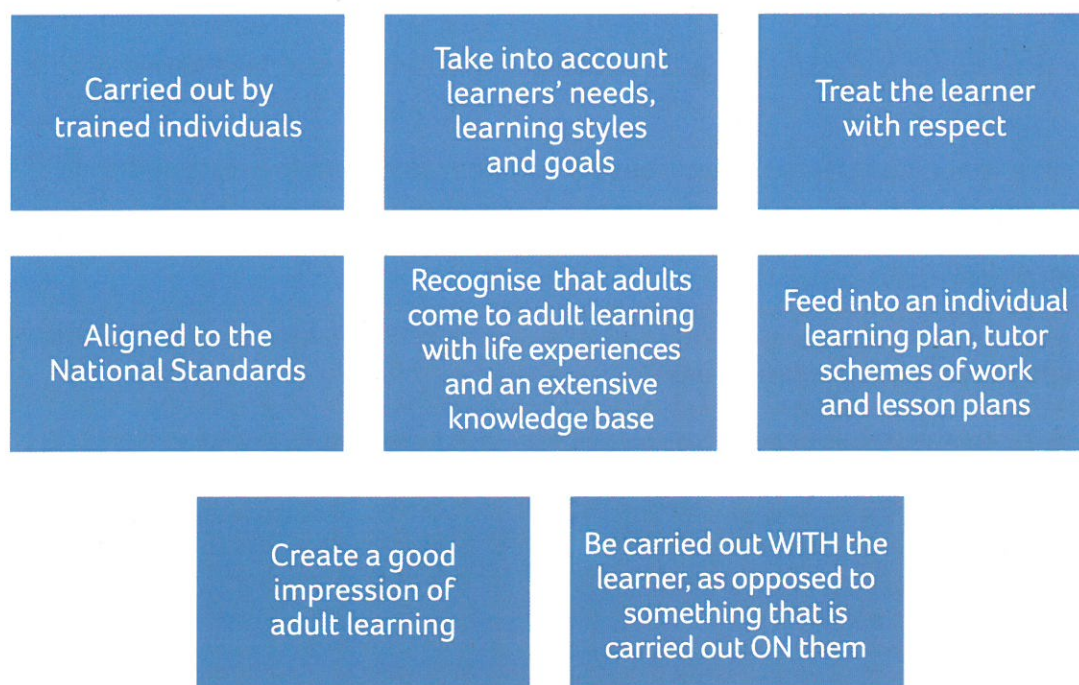
Adult Literacy learning is an active and expressive process. Learners have the right to explore their needs and interests, set their own goals and decide how, where and when they wish to learn (NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work 2012). Initial assessment, when carried out by the Adult Literacy Service (ALS) should be straight forward, informal and have a 'bottom up' approach. This ensures that the learner's needs and goals are met and they are correctly placed in tuition. The process should be learner centred, reflect the ethos of adult literacy provision, the professional judgement of the ALO and be a positive experience for the learner. Assessment is an evolving process and is holistic in nature. It is a process which begins at the initial meeting with the ALO (or designated assessment coordinator) and serves a number of crucial functions including:

- Ensuring the ALS is a good fit for the learner
- Establishing a welcoming and non-threatening environment
- Creating a 'point of contact' for the learner
- Providing information about courses on offer in the ALS
- Facilitating learner registration and gathering data required for monitoring

- Initiating dialogue about the learner's educational journey and providing them with the opportunity to ask questions
- Providing information on learner's current literacy level

The initial assessment process is not the sole responsibility of the ALO but requires the active involvement of the learner, to ensure that the information gathered reflects his/her skills and competencies. For genuine communication to occur, the assessor should have competence and experience in conducting assessments in a basic education environment. A learner centred holistic ethos, which underpins literacy provision must be maintained. This process has proved invaluable in securing and retaining the most hard to reach learners.

### Requirements for successful initial assessment:



**FIGURE 2**

## Purpose of Initial Assessment

Initial Assessment documents the 'starting point' of the learning journey for each learner in the literacy service. When carried out in the manner described it ensures a common understanding between the provider and the learner of initial learning needs and the correct placement in an appropriate learning programme. It supports the tutor in determining the what, when, and how to teach, to successfully reach the learning objectives and is the basis for on-going review. It helps learners clarify:

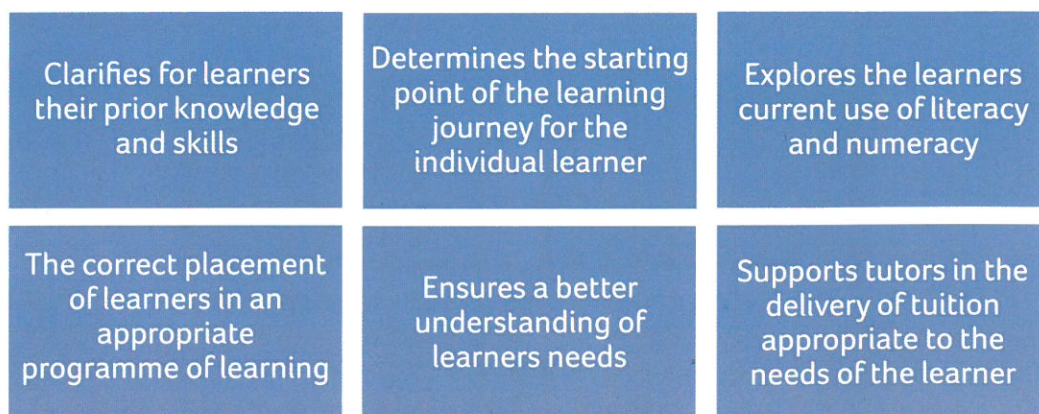
- Their prior knowledge and the skills they can build on
- Their current use of literacy and numeracy
- What they most want to learn
- Where and how they would like to work on their literacy and numeracy
- Who and what will help their learning

(NALA 2009)

The methodology used for initial assessment provides a platform for recording and monitoring learner progress in a clear and consistent way. Learning journals, tutor and learner feedback, and programme evaluation are valuable links between initial assessment and learner progress.

Initial assessment allows learners and the ALS together to determine existing levels of skills and to identify skill strengths and deficits. Initial assessment is a key element towards formative and summative assessment.

### The purpose of initial assessment



**FIGURE 3**

## What Should we Assess and Why?

There is no initial assessment framework in use in Adult Literacy programmes which is consistent and meets a common national standard and practices vary considerably across ETBs. Assessors in VECs contacted by St Patrick's College (Carrigan, 2010) stated that they felt 'most satisfied' about using assessment tools when they were able to select between several, 'those who were most satisfied tended to use a greater variety of tools' (p50).

Initial assessment process needs to be flexible, depending on the skill of the learner. A learner who has little or no literacy skills and has been out of education for a long time may benefit from an informal chat with a simple form at the initial stage. The Canadian Report, *Student Assessment in Adult Basic Education*, (Campbell, 2006, p65) supports this view in its recommendation: 'emergent readers and writers should not be subjected to formal standardised tests during intake assessment'

On the other hand, a learner whose long term goal is to achieve Level 3 accreditation would require a more formal structured assessment tool to assess reading, writing, numeracy and IT, as well as personal and interpersonal skills.

In-depth screening and profiling is a more formal process which comes later. It involves a whole centre approach and includes management, programme coordinators, tutors, learners and the Adult Education Guidance Service.

There is a need for a standardised assessment which would

- Assess learner ability across a number of basic skills and support them into a suitable course
- Produce information compatible with the reporting requirements of the DES thus aligning the learner on the NFQ

This tool should be suitable for use with literacy learners, but also adaptable for use with learners who are applying for other programmes, accredited and unaccredited but whose

literacy skills are insufficient, so called 'spikey literacy' levels. Learners wishing to access or progress onto further education and training programmes require a standard of literacy skills which empower them to complete their chosen programme of learning. By assessing reading, writing, numeracy, IT and soft skills areas, support will be identified and offered to the learner.

ALOs have consistently recommended an initial assessment framework linked to the NQF that would be adopted in all ETBs, which would result in a consistent assessment and placement of learners on programmes appropriate to their needs and which would address the skills requirements of individual learners.

### **Advantages of assessing all elements at an early stage:**

Assessing literacy, numeracy, IT and soft skills can identify the learners needs in each of these areas

It provides a baseline or starting point for tuition

Ensures correct placement of learner

Assists in the development of an individual learning plan

Facilitates the development of a student profile which is essential in establishing other factors that affect learning

Provides a link to formative assessment

Learner more likely to succeed

Informs Service Plans

**FIGURE 4**

**Currently, two thirds of literacy centres assess only literacy initially; the other one third assess numeracy, IT and soft skills as well.**

ALOs unanimously support the use of a comprehensive initial assessment process for learners. Investing time in a comprehensive initial assessment process ensures that learners are appropriately placed in the ALS. This ensures better outcomes for the learners, greater coherence for tutors and organisers and ultimately, better value for money – as learners' needs are heard, understood and responded to from the outset.

*'ETBs should develop and implement an initial assessment framework for the FET sector to a common national standard with appropriate referral protocols that support learners' entry onto courses'*

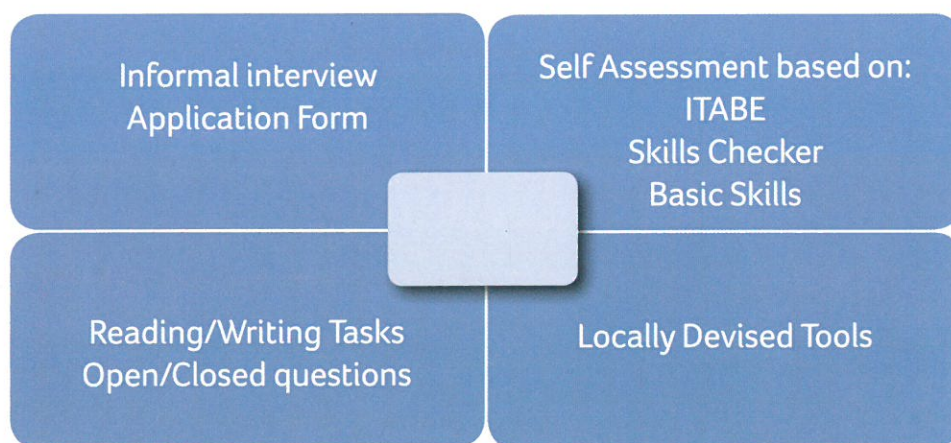
(Adult Literacy and Basic Skills in a Changing Sector, 2012 ALOA)

## Steps involved in Initial Assessment

There may be two steps involved in initial assessment. The first is the initial consultation with The ALO or designated assessment coordinator. The second step is the development of an in-depth profile which is a much more detailed analysis of a learner's specific needs and which will take place over time.

The first is Initial Consultation which is the first meeting between the ALS and the learner. Traditionally the ALO meets with the learners in an informal manner. Central to this process is the experience of the ALO who ensures the atmosphere is welcoming, non-threatening and non-judgemental. The ALO determines the most appropriate assessment method at this point based on the knowledge, skills and experience of each individual learner. For some learners this may be an informal interview which does not include reading or writing tasks or it may include an application form. For others self-assessment techniques, such as ITABE or local devised tools may be most beneficial.

### Initial Consultation – some or all of the following

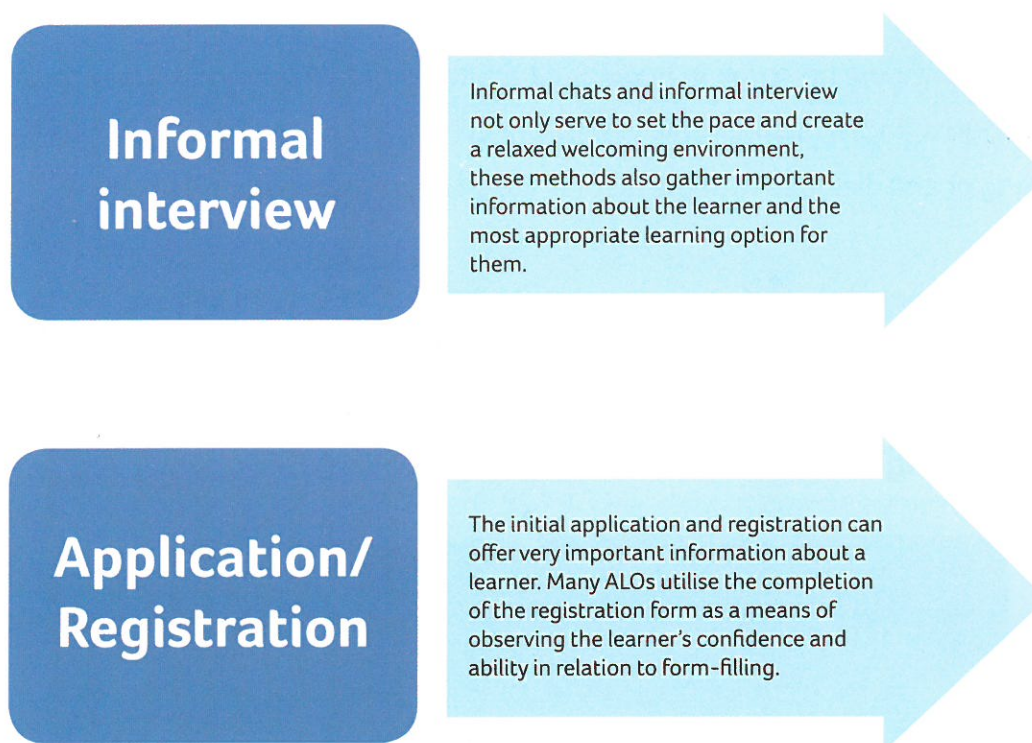


**FIGURE 5**

The Initial consultation is the first meeting between the Adult Literacy Service and the learner. The purpose of the initial consultation is multi-fold and includes the following:

- Ensure that the ALS is the appropriate service for the learner
- Provide information about courses and tuition options available in the ALS
- Empower learners to make informed choices regarding programmes, progression options and career paths
- Identify the learners skills, interests and abilities
- Assist in articulating learner needs, concerns and motivations
- To determine the 'starting point' of the learning journey
- To involve the learner in all aspects of the assessment process

### Initial Consultation Process - two stages



**FIGURE 6**

The strengths identified with these methods include:

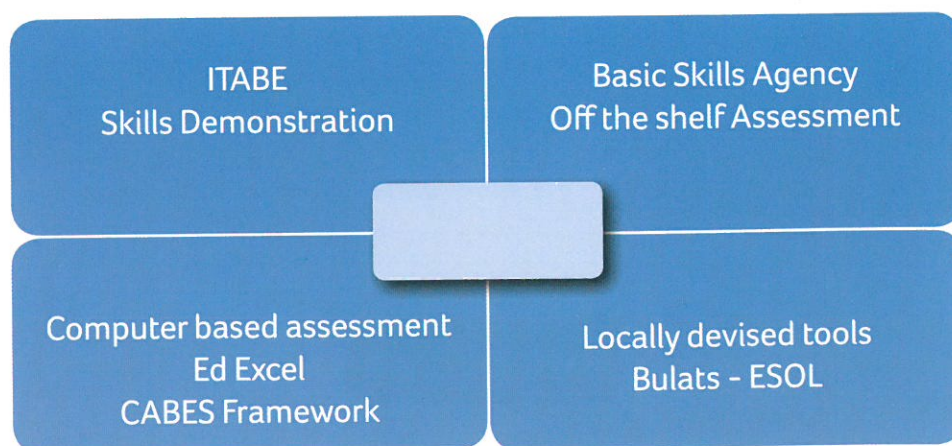
- Respect for the learner
- Holistic
- Reflect the ethos of adult literacy
- Learner 'voice' is heard
- Non-threatening environment
- Identifies Learner Goals
- Simple and appropriate

## Development of In-depth Profile

An in-depth profile is a much more detailed analysis of a learner's specific need. Tools used during an in-depth profile can pin-point exact areas where a learner will need to build their skills. In-depth profiles are an invaluable tool for tutors developing individual learning plans and schemes of work particularly if aligned to the National Framework of Qualifications. The purpose of an initial skills check/ assessment must be borne in mind at all times. It should be used equally to understand learner's strengths and weaknesses. It is best conceived of only as a means of furthering the understanding of and dialogue with the learner, which might take place over time.

Currently, there is no single tool in use across all Literacy Schemes in Ireland. When consulted ALOs identified the following broad categories of tools in use:

### In-depth profiling – some or all of the following



**FIGURE 7**

The strengths identified with these methods include:

- Assess a range of skills
- Identifies learner's goals
- Ensures correct placement
- Provides a precise starting point
- Clear direction for tutor
- User friendly
- Holistic

These processes provide an overview of approaches to assessment in literacy services across the country. The weakness of these methods is that they are not standardised with clear guidelines for implementation in all literacy services. The initial consultation process may rely heavily on self-assessment and the learners' ability to clearly communicate their needs while in-depth profiling may be too prescriptive, not suitable in all situations and could threaten the learner.

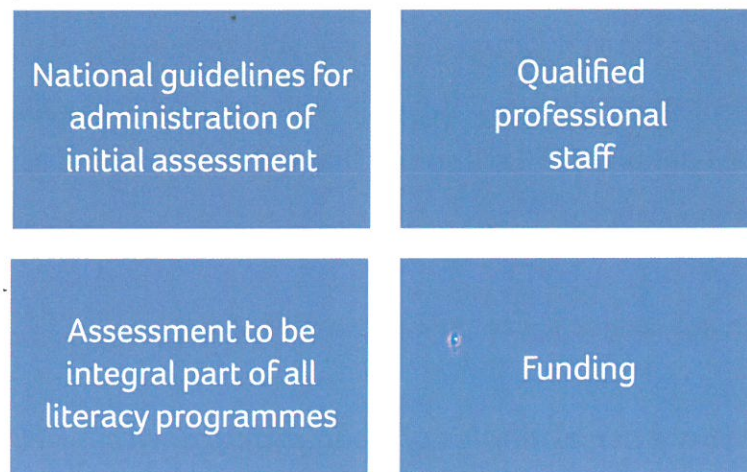
## *Capturing the Results*

Initial assessment is crucial to the correct placement of learners in the literacy service. It forms the basis for on-going review, formative assessment and ultimately summative assessment. The information gathered must meet the requirements of the various stakeholders – learners, tutors, services and the DES. Each of the stakeholders require information relevant to their perspective and the methods and materials used in initial assessment and in-depth profiling must capture this information. The main challenge in recording initial assessment results is to garner information to meet the needs of all stakeholders. While there is standardised reporting systems in place for all services, the methods of collecting information is not standardised across all services. Some of the issues which need to be addressed include:

- Assessment can be time consuming and limited resources are available to the ALS for initial assessment. The administration of initial assessment including designated resources forms an integral part of all Skills for Work programmes. This model should be extended to all literacy programmes
- Accuracy of the findings - defining levels can mean different things to different people. Guidance on definitions, applied nationally, can be a valuable tool in ensuring that the information gathered from both initial consultation and in-depth profiling is carried out in a consistent manner
- Recording for the DES, ETBs, Literacy Services, the tutor and the learner require different information
- Initial consultation process may not involve a structured format but requires a recording system which captures the information gathered
- 'Spikey' literacy levels can be hard to categorise
- The experience of the person who carries out the assessment is crucial and the process needs to take account of this factor. Learners are not always comfortable and may not be able to express themselves or their needs. Gathering this information may take time.

- The initial consultation and the in-depth profiling may be carried out in just one visit or over many visits. Flexibility is important when considering recording methods for assessment.
- Confidentiality of information gathered and the Data Protection Act.

### Requirements to meet these challenges



**FIGURE 8**

## ***Structures required for best approach to Initial Assessment***

- A National Initial Assessment Framework (NIAF) for the literacy service should be developed, based on current good practice and which is learner centred and flexible enough to be adapted for local areas
- The NIAF will recognise that assessment is a skilled process and literacy practitioners should be consulted throughout the design of the assessment framework
- The implementation of the NIAF will require designated resources including standardised Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for staff carrying out assessment. Standardised CPD at national level will ensure that those carrying out assessment at local level are using the same approach
- Whole sector approach to assessment and placement of learners

***ALOA acknowledge there are examples of good practice within ETBs***

## Recommendations

- ETBI supports the development of a National Initial Assessment Framework for the literacy service by organising a working group to develop guidelines for its administration in consultation with ALOA and other relevant stakeholders
- Existing initial assessment tools and good practice should inform the development of an standardised initial assessment framework
- Designated resources for administering initial assessment should be made available in all literacy programmes
- Standardised CPD training for staff who carry out initial assessment
- Screening at point of entry for all applicants to the Further Education and Training (FET) service levels 1-6
- To support screening standardised methods and tools are developed. Screening tools should be mapped to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
- Review and adapt existing structural supports and models of good practice with a view to disseminating for general use across the FET sector

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## Appendix 1

### Introduction

The Adult Literacy Organisers' Forum 2013 is an annual event which was organised in partnership by NALA and the ALOA. It is part of a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for ALOs. The primary purpose of the Forum is to offer ALOs the opportunity to acquire new up to date information and training. It is to help inform practice and to develop thinking for policy development.

ALOA agreed the theme of their annual forum in 2013 would be 'initial assessment'. The forum afforded ALOs, an opportunity to review and reflect on existing practices, document their findings and make recommendations on good practice. The outcome of this work would be a document which would:

- Review current initial assessment processes with a view to improvement
- Raise awareness that the initial assessment process may vary with different learners
- Raise awareness of the importance of initial assessment and placement of learners to successful learning outcomes
- Recommend models of good practice in initial assessment processes

### Methodology

A sub-group of ALOA and NALA's Principal Officer, Fergus Dolan, met on six occasions prior to the forum to plan and develop the event. Dr. Liz McSkeane was retained to assist in the process of collecting, reviewing and collating data on existing practice and to formulate questions and ideas for the continuing work of the forum. Tasks were developed which invited ALOs to reflect on their own practice in the area of initial assessment, the use of staff, resources, materials and tools and to consider ways they could both share their own good practice, and expand on the range of tools, methods and practices used in their own centre.

### ALOA Forum Preparatory Work: Initial Assessment Information

The information-gathering process was built around three structured tasks which were developed in consultation with the ALOA Executive

### **1. Assessment Processes**

- Areas of Initial Assessment that are already going well
- areas for development
- development needs identified

### **2. Assessment Methods**

- Strengths
- Development needs identified

### **3. Recording Processes**

- Strengths
- Development needs identified

The purpose of the preliminary conclusions was to guide how the information gathered during this process could be used to support the ALOA Forum, with a broader goal of identifying areas of interest that may be explored in developing a long-term strategy for ALOA policy development. (Appendix 1)

## **The Forum**

The running order of the Forum included a combination of:

### **1. Presentations from experts in the area of assessment:**

- a) 'Professional Judgement and Standards in Assessment' Jay Derrick, Interim Director, Post Compulsory Initial Teacher Education, Institute of Education, University of London
- b) 'Initial and on-going assessment: Lessons learned from abroad' Janet Looney, Associate Expert, European Institute for Education and Social Practice
- c) 'Adult Literacy Review: Overview and findings on initial assessment' Mary Kett, Education Consultant
- d) 'Initial assessment: Purpose and practice, Liz Mc Skene Education Consultant

### **2. Workshops to address specific tasks – Café Style workshop facilitated by Alan Hayes, Change Process Facilitator**

- a) Content and Purpose: what should we assess and why?
- b) Methods and Materials: how should we assess our learners?
- c) Capturing the results: how should we record initial assessment findings?

### **3. Case Studies on existing practice in Adult Literacy Service**

- a) City of Galway VEC
- b) City of Dublin VEC

## Appendix 2

### Preparation for ALO Forum

The purpose of the following documents is to support the preparation of the ALO Forum, to be held in Galway on 18th and 19th April. Participating ALOs are asked to complete three short activities, using the structured checklists and templates supplied below. This process will:

- Encourage ALOs to reflect on specific areas of initial assessment;
- Provide information to the ALO steering group and NALA that will help to ensure that the content and format of the Forum matches participants' needs and interests.

Participating ALOs, and /or anyone who carries out initial assessment (programme co-ordinators, resource workers etc) are asked to follow this process:

- Carry out Activity 1 on their own, or in collaboration with tutors or programme co-ordinators in their centre who are involved in initial assessment.
- Work through Activities 2 and 3, either on their own or with other staff involved.
- The templates supporting Activities 2 and 3 are designed to contain descriptions of **one** assessment method and related processes. ALOs are welcome to include more than one example. Copy the template and enter one example.
- Participants are not asked to return their completed checklists and templates.
- However, they are asked **to bring them along to the Forum.**

They are also asked to **summarise the results of their reflections**. Space for the summary is shown on the page headed Section B in each activity. ALOs are invited to complete these in the attached Word document, then paste their answers into an email and send to your Regional Coordinator

## Preparation for ALO Forum

### ACTIVITY 1 - Section A

This checklist summarises key processes involved in initial assessment. Reflect on each item and decide whether your centre is already doing this wholly, partly, or not at all. Give a rating of 1, 2, 3 or 4 to each item by circling the number that best describes the current situation:

1. We are already doing this.
2. We do this to some extent, but could expand or improve in this area.
3. We don't do this but it's not relevant for us.
4. We don't do this, and we would like to.

You do not need to return this checklist. Use it as a support for reflection on your centre.

Item	Rating
<b>Methods: how we carry out initial assessment</b>	
1. We assess all newcomers to the centre before or soon after they start.	1 2 3 4
2. We ask the individual to tell us about their literacy strengths and needs.	1 2 3 4
3. We use a screening test or pack to identify the learner's literacy level and needs.	1 2 3 4
4. We observe the new person carrying out literacy tasks.	1 2 3 4
5. We use a different methods to assess the new learner's literacy.	1 2 3 4
6. We use a combination of methods.	1 2 3 4
7. The ALO carries out the initial assessment.	1 2 3 4
8. A person delegated by the ALO carries out the initial assessment.	1 2 3 4
9. The tutor carries out the initial assessment.	1 2 3 4
10. Different people may carry out the initial assessment.	1 2 3 4
11. Other (please specify).	1 2 3 4
<b>Purpose: we carry out initial assessment in order to...</b>	
12. Find out what learner's current level of literacy.	1 2 3 4
13. Decide where to place them – individual or group.	1 2 3 4
14. Identify specific areas of strength and weakness.	1 2 3 4
15. Help draw up a plan of work.	1 2 3 4
16. Provide statistical information for the VEC or DES.	1 2 3 4
17. Provide a base-line from which the learner's progress can be judged.	1 2 3 4
18. Other (please specify).	1 2 3 4

**What we assess: in addition to literacy,**

19. We assess new students' IT skills.	1	2	3	4
20. We assess new students' numeracy skills	1	2	3	4
21. We assess new students' soft skills.	1	2	3	4
22. We assess (or arrange assessments) for dyslexia.	1	2	3	4
23. Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4

**Resources: to carry out initial assessment, we use**

24. Individual checklists or other tools designed and used by individual tutors.	1	2	3	4
25. A locally-devised set of checklists and tools used across the centre.	1	2	3	4
26. A set of checklists and tools used across the whole VEC.	1	2	3	4
27. An externally-devised set of checklists and tools used across the centre.	1	2	3	4
28. Commercially-produced materials – for example an assessment resource pack.	1	2	3	4
29. Materials shared amongst colleagues.	1	2	3	4
30. Contents of a bank of resources kept in the centre for common use.	1	2	3	4
31. Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4

**Recording results: we keep a record of the results of initial assessment using**

32. Informal notes passed on to tutors.	1	2	3	4
33. A structured form or checklist designed by the centre.	1	2	3	4
34. A structured form or checklist designed or provided by the VEC.	1	2	3	4
35. Materials provided through commercial resource pack.	1	2	3	4
36. Other (please specify).	1	2	3	4

**General Comments**

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## ACTIVITY 1 - Section B

The next 4 questions summarise the result of your reflections. Insert **only the numbers** as your answers.

Please paste your answers into an email and send it to your Regional Organiser. We will use your answers to help plan your annual Forum on April 18th and 19th.

1. Which processes are already going well in your centre? (insert **only the numbers** of all items that you gave a rating of 1).
2. Which processes are not happening in your centre, because they aren't relevant to your situation? (insert numbers of all items that you gave a rating of 3)
3. Which processes are you doing only partly, or not at all, that you would like to develop further? (insert numbers of all items that you gave a rating of 2 and 4).
4. Any comments?

Name ..... Centre .....

## ACTIVITY 2 - Section A - Assessment Methods

This activity builds on your earlier reflections about key processes in initial literacy assessment. It focuses on a concrete example of a **method** of assessing literacy.

You do not need to return this template. Use it as a support for reflection on your centre. If possible, collaborate with one or more tutors in completing it.

Topic	Answer
1. Who carries out this initial assessment process?	
2. Where does it happen?	
3. How long does it take?	
4. Does it happen on one occasion or over two or more sessions?	
5. What materials do you use? (please be specific)	
6. What exactly does the person being assessed do? (eg speak, read, write etc)	
7. What exactly does the assessor do?	
8. Are the outcomes of the assessment recorded?	
9. If 'yes', how are the results recorded?	
10. If 'yes', who sees the results?	
11. What are the results used for?	
12. What is the main purpose of initial assessment in your centre?	

## ACTIVITY 2 - Section B

The next 2 questions distil the result of your reflections on Activity 1, and your analysis of a current literacy assessment practice in Activity 2.

Please paste your answers into an email and send it to your Regional Organiser. We will use your answers to help plan your annual Forum on April 18th and 19th.

1. What are the strengths of our initial assessment processes?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What areas could we develop and improve?

Name ..... Centre .....

## Appendix 3

### Workshop questions for ALO Forum

#### 1. Content and purpose: what should we assess and why?

- (i) Currently, some centres assess only literacy at the early stages; others assess, or would like to assess, numeracy and IT and soft skills as well.

What are the pros and cons of assessing all these elements at the initial stages?

- (ii) 'Initial assessment' can mean different things to different people.

What are the differences between assessing for an initial screening, and for an in-depth profile of the learner's needs?

- (iii) How can initial assessment be linked with on-going review of learners' progress?

#### 2. Methods and Materials: how should we assess?

- (i) Brainstorm as many methods of assessment that can be used at the initial stage as you can think of: both for screening and for getting an in-depth learner profile.
- (ii) Clarify the range of purposes each might serve. Give some examples of materials that can be used to support this and classify them according to type.
- (iii) Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each method, in relation to the different purposes they might serve; and of the different types of materials.

#### 3. Capturing the results: how should we record initial assessment findings?

- (i) What are the challenges of recording initial assessment results so that they are useful to tutors and learners?
- (ii) How can these challenges be resolved?

**4. What kind of structures do we need to get the best approach to initial assessment?**

**(i) National system of initial assessment vs local systems**

What are the pros and cons of having a national system of initial assessment, and having this carried out at local level?

**(ii) Which elements of an initial assessment process should be standardised/common to a whole system (either national or VEC wide) and which should be flexible and decided/devised at local level?**

**(iii) What kind of resources are needed to support a robust initial assessment process? Should these be provided nationally or locally or both?**

## Glossary

ALOA	Adult Literacy Organisers' Association
ALS	Adult Literacy Service
BULATS	Business Language Testing Service
CABES	Clare Adult Basic Education Service
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECD	Education Development Centre
ETB	Education and Training Board (former VECs)
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland (former IVEA)
FET	Further Education and Training
IT	Information Technology
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NIAF	National Initial Assessment Framework
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
VEC	Vocational Education Committee





Adult Literacy Organisers' Association



AN tSábhú Oideachais Leamlíneigh agus Scileanna  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

**SOLAS**

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